**Mukkuvar**
The mukkuvars inhabit the Southern coast of India, in Kanyakumari and settling as far north as the Malabar coast on the West. They are believed to have emigrated from Sri Lanka. Mukkuvars were originally Hindus but converted in large numbers to Christianity, with the advent of the Portuguese Jesuits during the 16th century. This mass conversion was primarily the result of combination of factors including the humiliations of untouchability that they were subjected to, and their aspiration to autonomy and economic independence.

The mukkuvars of Kanyakumari District and those of Kerala have a considerable affinity and are capable of conversing freely and with confidence in Malayalam. A major cultural difference between the mukkuvars from the southern and northern parts of the western coast is that while the northerners practice marumakkat thayam (matriarchal lineage), quite significant in Kerala, those of the south adopt makkat thayam (patriarchal system). There are two well-defined groups among the Mukkuvars — Pulukkaiyars and Arayans. Arayans were the ‘masters of ceremonies’ in the caste, affording leadership in the religious and social matrix of life. Pulukkaiyars are also mukkuvars in the real sense of the term: but there exists a deeply carved status difference between them and the mukkuvars wherein the Pulukkaiyars belong to a far lower economic stratum.

**For further reading:**

